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Short Notes Outline International Standards on Criminal Content Restrictions

In many countries, criminal restrictions on the content of what may be published or broadcast seriously undermine respect for the right to freedom of expression. Often they ban far too much speech in the first place while in other cases they are drafted in vague terms which render them susceptible of overbroad application. The Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD) is today releasing a set of short Notes on international standards for criminal restrictions in five key areas, with the aim of helping interested stakeholders better understand the issues involved.

The Notes were prepared for the workshop: Toward Media Regulatory Reform in the Middle East and North Africa: Workshop on Criminal Restrictions on Media Content. The event – which brought together experts from across the region in Beirut, Lebanon, from 24-25 April 2014 – was hosted jointly by CLD, International Media Support and Maharat Foundation. The Notes discuss major issues and international standards in six key thematic areas, namely alternatives to criminal rules, defamation, hate speech, national security, blasphemy and privacy.

“The Middle East and North Africa is going through a tremendous transition, as a range of local actors, including media outlets, civil society and increasingly political players are demanding legal frameworks which conform to international human rights standards,” said CLD Executive Director, Toby Mendel. *“The purpose of these Notes is to provide these actors with a clear, concise statement of relevant international standards in the area of criminal content restrictions.”*

Despite recent improvements, the Middle East is among the world’s worst regions in terms of respect for freedom of expression. Although the Notes focus on issues which are of particular relevance in that region, the standards they outline are derived from international law and are, as a result, applicable everywhere in the world.

The Notes are available in English and Arabic at: <http://www.law-democracy.org/live/short-notes-outline-international-standards-on-criminal-content-restrictions>.

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